



Above: A typical group of bullock drovers. Transporting wool was a problem as sheep runs reached further and further inland. Long journeys by bullock 'trains' took many weeks. Note the little boy who would be in charge of making the tea and doing odd jobs around the camp.

The building and extending of railways was vital to the prosperity of the wool industry and the railways often followed where the sheep led. **Below:** a modern, mechanised depot for receiving wool from grovers before selling. Wool is compressed, then loaded into containers for shipment.



Above: Hand shearing with blades in 1883. All wool was cut by hand until the invention of a shearing machine by Frederick Wolseley in the 1880's. It was used first in 1888. The head shearer was known as the 'ringer'

and was usually the best shearer. The record for hand shearing went to a 'boss shearer' in 1892 in Queensland who shored 321 sheep in 8 hours 40 mins. In Oct. 1965, Kevin Sarre shored 346 sheep in 7 hours 40 mins, with a machine, but in 1892, the average weight of a fleece was 2.2 kgs. whereas today its weight is about double this. The 1880's were the heydays of large sheds, where up to 60 shearers would work at a time on flocks up to 350,000. Today few sheds employ more than 20 shearers at a time, the average being 4 or 5 shearers as smaller sheep farms mix sheep rearing with other farm activities. Shearers were leaders in the development of large Trade Unions, because their work was hard and back-breaking with very bad conditions. They were paid, and still are today, on the number of sheep shorn, so their wages were never secure. In the 1880's they formed the Amalgamated Shearer's Union which faced its biggest strike in 1890 when the bosses reduced their wages due to poor wool prices. In 1894 it was renamed the Australian Worker's Union when shearers amalgamated with other Unions. Today the A.W.U. plays an important part in Trade Union affairs and the pastoral industry.

